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Women, mentoring, and the degree : tiptoeing through the academic tulips

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine issues related to mentoring women in higher education. Specifically, this paper will address issues concerning the chilly climate women face on campus, issues that focus on gender stereotypes for women in higher education, and issues which prohibit successful mentoring between women. students and.administrators. Finally, recommendations for student service administrators to· enhance mentoring relationships are suggested.

WOMEN, MENTORING, AND THE DEGREE:

TIPTOEING THROUGH THE ACADEMIC TULIPS

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Administration

and Counseling

University of Northern Iowa

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

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by

Linda Marie Whittle Schneider

May 1997

This Research Paper by: Linda Marie Whittle Schneider

Entitled: Women, Mentoring, and the Degree: Tiptoeing

Through the Academic Tulips

has been approved as meeting the research paper

requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in

Education.

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4/28/97
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There is an old cliché which states that "leaders are born and not made." From an historical perspective, the dearth of women in the academic world suggests that women who desire leadership roles struggle to obtain positions as faculty and administrators in higher education. Institutions are enrolling women in greater numbers (Over Forty, 1996), but research indicates that opportunities for mentorship still remain inadequate.

Recently, it was found that undergraduate women students 18 to 24 years old represent 52% of the student population (Over Forty, 1996). The same study found that of students aged 40 and older, women represent 66% of undergraduates and 66% of graduate students. These numbers indicate that women are attending institutions of higher education in greater numbers, more than their male peers. Considering the rising numbers of female students, it could be assumed that the number of women faculty and administrators are also increasing. However, women represent only 25% of the faculty (Hensel, 1991) and 15.8% of the top administrative positions in higher education (Van Alstyne & Withers, 1977). A later report (American Council on Education, Office of Women in Higher Education, ACOWHE, 1981) found that 8% of university

and college presidents are women of whom nearly half represent religious orders. With such small numbers, the possibilities for effective mentor and protégé relationships appear remote.

The purpose of this paper is to examine issues related to mentoring women in higher education. Specifically, this paper will address issues concerning the chilly climate women face on campus, issues that focus on gender stereotypes for women in higher education, and issues which prohibit successful mentoring between women students and administrators. Finally, recommendations for student service administrators to enhance mentoring relationships are suggested.

Chilly Campus Climates

Institutions of higher learning are historically comprised of white, male, hierarchical structures. Through the years, these structures have remained secure and have encouraged individuals to hold on to the traditional attitudes concerning women who want to enter higher education as students and administrators. Studies have shown that these attitudes continue to promote a chilly campus climate for women (Caplin, 1993; Hall & Sandler, 1983; Heinrich, 1995; Merrion &

Thompson, 1990; Patton, 1990; Rich, 1979; Sandler, 1986).

Feminists argue that when women attempt to earn a degree, their integrity becomes jeopardized (Rich, 1979). Even though institutions portray a message of equality, in reality women are made to feel like second-class citizens who must follow the unwritten rules established by men if they are going to succeed in higher education. Women students and administrators bring a richness to learning from previous experiences. Unfortunately, socialization in higher education institutions de-emphasizes relational values and teachings, a strong point for women who define themselves by their relationships to others. This viewpoint suggests that women who do struggle to gain access, independence, and recognition from the hierarchical university system may suddenly find themselves invisible (Hall & Sandler, 1983, 1984; Rich, 1979; Sandler, 1986).

Several studies (Caplin, 1993; Hall & Sandler, 1984; Rich, 1979; Sandler, 1986) indicated that some women who are accepted by male colleagues assume masculine roles and behaviors that force them to become distant with women peers in order to survive. Feminists

further point out that women who do not take their rightful place in faculty and administrator roles do, in fact, deny other women the role models and mentors they need.

Although some institutions strategically place women administrators in visible positions, men still maintain the majority and tend to use subtle behaviors to discount input from women (Hall & Sandler, 1984; Rich, 1979; Sandler, 1986). Hall and Sandler (1984) used the term micro-equalities to refer to subtle behaviors used by women and men in faculty and administrator positions which excessively point out or, conversely, totally ignore, women on campus. These behaviors are used to devalue women and their abilities and to undermine their self-perception. Often, they are so artfully communicated that women tend to think these behaviors are normal unless continually repeated. Women protégés seeking mentors look for successful women in the field who are self-assured and respected. The behaviors toward women administrators, again, become a reason why so few are available for mentorship.

According to Wood (1997), men and women communicate differently. Women use communication skills to establish and maintain relationships, whereas men

use those same skills to gain and maintain power, independence, and status. In higher education, women students are often ignored or interrupted, whereas male students receive recognition and respect (Hall & Sandler, 1984; Sandler, 1986).

In administrator roles, women are fewer in number and often are seen as tokens and not as serious peers. Therefore, they are often left out of campus, interpersonal, and social networks that endorse camaraderie and teamwork (Hall & Sandler, 1984; Sandler, 1986). Even though institutional mission statements and campus activities support friendships and team-building among students, administration and faculty neglect to model those objectives. Considering "women define themselves by the ability to care for others" (Gilligan, 1993, p. 17), it would seem that institutions would embrace these values for the idealism of campus community that is portrayed to students.

A study supporting Gilligan's theory, which included 31 midwest universities and colleges, found "women administrators rated giving and taking, playing several roles, and cooperation as significant factors in team building. Male administrators found competing,

identifying appropriate tasks, and attending to process as well as content of teamwork as areas of importance for team building" (Merrion & Thompson, 1990, p. 144). This study also supported Wood's (1997) theory that men portray power of utmost importance.

Power, if it is shared, can be used beneficially (Heinrich, 1995) in building professional and protégé relationships. Power can also be used to discourage inappropriate behavior by protégés or, in some cases, by mentors who abuse their power and become "silent betrayers, letting their protégés flounder and fail, through lack of assistance, byzantine university bureaucracy, or victimization by associate male and female mentors" (p. 450). Given this implication, power can be manifested as a great source of a chilly climate for women on campuses.

Gender Stereotypes

Women trying to advance in higher education as students or administrators find they are trapped by historical stereotypes. Studies show that cultural socialization of these stereotypes force women into unwarranted roles and, in some cases, lower their self-esteem (Borman & Guido-DiBrito, 1986; Caplin, 1993; Chisholm, 1972; Fay & Tokarczyk, 1993; Gardner, 1993;

Hall & Sandler, 1984; Langston, 1993; Rich, 1979; Sandler, 1972).

Women are punished for being women, for becoming wives and mothers, and for trying to educate themselves in order to obtain upward social mobility (Borman & Guido-DiBrito, 1986; Rich, 1979). Society identifies women by their appearance and appropriate conduct. If a woman dresses sloppily, her work is assumed sloppy; or if she leans toward masculine clothing and short hair, she is considered "bitchy" and overly aggressive. The opposite holds true if a woman dresses in frills and short skirts and wears long hair. She is then considered brainless, weak, and submissive (Sandler, 1986). Therefore, women appear to have few acceptable choices in the way they present themselves.

Men, on the other hand, are perceived automatically as role models and are forgiven for inappropriate behavior because what they do is seen by society as the norm. Men who portray aggressiveness and confidence and who exercise authority are respected and are recognized by their peers as real achievers. Women with those same traits are viewed as conceited, power crazed, pushy, and "sleeping their way to the top" (Caplin, 1993; Sandler, 1986). In most cases, men are

primarily perceived by their intelligence whereas women are primarily perceived by their emotions. Again, these perceptions limit women.

Traditional roles for women have been nurturer, caretaker, and core of the family (Gilligan, 1993). When women step out of these roles and into roles that are dominated by men in higher education, they become less valued and invisible (Caplin, 1993; Sandler, 1986). Women students and administrators often find themselves in "catch-22 situations that make them feel crazed, but are caused by attempts to survive in a system that may damn them no matter what they do" (Caplin, 1993, p. 64).

Women from poor and middle class populations and women of color striving for upward mobility face a double dilemma (Fay & Tokarczyk, 1993; Gardner, 1993; Langston, 1993). Women students and administrators from these groups inherit stereotypes given to all women, in addition to class and cultural stereotypes that create hardships caused by colleagues deterring their advancement. In addition, family and friends outside of the campus environment often do not support the decision for women students and administrators to progress, especially if cultural values and teachings

are strong in tradition. Some women find they must sever ties with family and friends in order to survive in their new world. The cultural norms that persist can make women students and administrators emotionally and psychologically stronger or force them to question new values and beliefs (Langston, 1993). Further research concerning women of various class and ethnic backgrounds needs to be done in order to assist them in overcoming stereotypes having to do with issues related to social and cultural discrimination.

For women students and administrators in general, however, gender stereotypes are reflected in discriminatory acts against them. As mentioned earlier, women students and administrators become invisible and are denied incentives and promotions that are commonly given to men (Caplin, 1993; Sandler, 1986). Studies have shown that men feel uncomfortable working with women and use subtle behaviors and tactics to force women in higher education into isolation and to prevent them from seeking advancement (Caplin, 1993; Hall & Sandler, 1984; Sandler, 1986). Often these behaviors and tactics contain sexual overtures and sexist language that women perceive as flirting.

Sexual harassment is a more recent link to gender stereotypes in higher education. Verbal and non-verbal communication styles between women and men often become misinterpreted (Wood, 1997). Studies have shown that men use verbal and non-verbal cues, such as direct eye contact, smiling while speaking, or leaning back in a chair, to indicate power. Women use these same cues to indicate that they are paying attention or that they like the person with whom they are communicating. Men tend to misinterpret these cues as "coming on" to them (Hall & Sandler, 1984; Wood, 1997). The implications of these types of behaviors can have negative effects on the mentor and protégé relationship if those involved do not understand gender communication styles.

Women students become discouraged from seeking out mentors of the opposite sex when they are the receivers of harassment or when they see forms of harassment and discrimination on campus that go unpunished. Equal opportunity then becomes a myth when women turn to women mentors who are in short supply (Sandler, 1972).

Mentoring Between Women Students
and Administrators

Higher education mentors perform various functions to enhance student careers. Mentors serve as role

models, setting examples for students to help them
organize and establish values and goals, to guide them
toward career goals, and to teach them knowledge that
cannot be learned in the classroom but only through
experience, encouragement, and support while building
self-confidence. Mentors also provide information that
is commonly not known or is classified as "unwritten
rules," acting as protectors when students step over
invisible protocol and social lines (Guido-DiBrito,
Carpenter, & DiBrito, 1986; Hall & Sandler, 1983;
Torrance, 1984; Zey, 1984). When women students and
administrators seek out mentors that provide these
roles, the task becomes more difficult for reasons
other than those described earlier concerning
stereotypes and chilly climates on campus.

Studies have shown that women students tend to
seek out other women as mentors (Fish, 1993; Hall &
Sandler, 1983; Torrance, 1984; Zey, 1984). Women shy
away from men mentors just as men hesitate to mentor
women students because of stereotyping and sexual
connotations. Men feel that women do not take
institutional roles seriously enough to formulate
mentoring relationships that encourage success (Hall &
Sandler, 1983; Zey, 1984). Often women students appear

invisible because of their numbers and part-time
enrollment. Campuses having few women make them over
visible, and male mentors become targets for
discreditation when women protégés fail or when rumors
concerning sexual involvement circulate. The same
studies show women mentors risk those same issues which
endanger their careers in addition to extending time
and commitment to the protégé.

Potential women mentors often find that they are
so overloaded with research, teaching, and committee
work that they have little time to mentor (Fish, 1993;
Hall & Sandler, 1983; Sandler, 1986). In order to meet
institutional demands placed on women administrators by
the historical values initiated by men, women find that
they must do more work and spend longer hours in order
to meet the standards placed on them. Successful
mentoring is time consuming and can pose threats to
their own careers. Thus, women remain hesitant to take
on the added responsibility.

Studies have shown (Hall & Sandler, 1983;
Torrance, 1984; Zey, 1984) that if a prospective
protégé appears exceptionally bright and enthusiastic,
women resist mentoring them for fear of being
overshadowed. Men and women mentors alike, if not

secure in their positions, may see the protégé as a
threat and may find ways to sabotage the protégé's
career by setting goals too high or too low or by
adding unnecessary pressure on performance. In some
cases, women protégés may find themselves being used
and not being recognized for contributions they have
made to further the mentor's personal success (Hall &
Sandler, 1983; Torrance, 1984; Zey, 1984).

With so few women in administrator roles, women
making it into the system are often mentored by men
(Hall & Sandler, 1983; Torrance, 1984; Zey, 1984). Some
women have been influenced by the male perspective of
higher education and have not been allowed to explore
their own values and visions of mentor relationships.
Women mentors risk overlooking positive skills of
potential women protégés or becoming over-involved and
losing sight of their own goals. Thus, good mentoring
indicates the necessity for continual communication.

Mentors serve as informants to protégés so they
know what is going on within the institutional walls
and what rules need to be followed (Guido-DiBrito et
al., 1986; Hall & Sandler, 1983; Zey, 1984). The
mentor's failure to relate information regularly to the
protégé can result in the protégé making mistakes that

hurt both careers. Mentors need to guide protégés toward establishing roadmaps while providing feedback that achieves success. If communication does not occur regularly, protégés lose sight and often take no communication as miscommunication meaning that the mentor does not want to help them. Continual communication also assists the protégé with establishing network systems on campus.

Studies have shown (Hall & Sandler, 1983; Torrance, 1984; Zey, 1984) that successful mentors initiate relationships between their protégé and colleagues. Successful mentors also initiate friendly competition in order to help develop critical thinking and self-esteem. However, when a mentor feels threatened by a protégé, the mentor may turn the competition unfriendly in order to maintain prestige. Occasionally, mentors and protégés reverse roles (Torrance, 1984; Zey, 1984). Mentors take on the qualities of the protégé and may find that once the protégé is established in her own career, the mentor turns to the protégé for advice.

Mentoring in higher education is a responsibility that can be carried out successfully and can benefit both mentor and protege. Studies have shown (e.g., Hall

& Sandler, 1983) that women proteges who seek out women
mentors have a clearer view of their career goals and
are more confident in achieving success. Institutions
with strong policies that support mentoring have also
been found to be less threatening for women students to
seek out mentors of either gender and be successful
(Hall & Sandler, 1983; Sandler, 1986; Zey, 1984).

Recommendations

In order for colleges and universities to support
successful mentoring for women students and
administrators, the first step is to endorse more women
for administrator roles. Increasing numbers of female
students indicate that more women will be looking for
mentors to assist them during college and
administrative careers. Presently, women administrators
cannot accommodate currently enrolled women students.
With women students surpassing 50% of the total student
population, universities and colleges need to equate
the number of women administrators to that of men, thus
giving women students the opportunity to make mentor
connections with more women.

A second course of action that universities and
colleges must take is establishing more mentoring
programs. Institutions already promoting programs are

benefiting from teamwork and improved campus-wide relationships. Initiating structured programs with mentor orientations and continual guidance for those wanting to mentor but who do not know how can establish sound foundations for success and can create a better understanding of communication styles. Mentoring is often seen as a time consumer. In order for administrators to mentor, workloads need to be lightened or distributed on a more equal basis. Those participating in mentoring programs need the time and recognition for doing so.

Institutions can encourage leadership roles among undergraduate and graduate students by preparing them for mentoring in higher education and by establishing programs that give students the opportunity to mentor each other. With more non-traditional-age students entering academe, institutions have the opportunity to encourage older students to share life experiences with traditional-age students. Mentoring programs that endorse student interaction and strengthen career development, personal development, and team-building create networking systems that can be used during professional careers.

Successful programming does not work unless competent people who believe in mentoring participate in it. Men and women administrators and students need to work continually together to supervise mentoring on campus, to incorporate new programs supporting leadership, and to promote policies that encourage strategies to combat problems.

Finally, institutions need actively to advertise mentoring programs and policies in order for students to participate. Students need to know what programs are available, how to become involved, who to contact, and what the advantages are of becoming part of a mentoring program.

According to Greek mythology, when Ulysses placed Mentor in charge of his son Telemachus, Mentor actively guided, guarded, and taught the boy. He was not placed in the role just for appearances. More women administrators need to be given the opportunity to mentor actively so institutional climates and stereotypes will change in a way that women are recognized for quality leadership.

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